

Message Text

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47

ACTION EUR-25

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AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY HELSINKI

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AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BONN

Q/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 556

AMEMBASSY ROME

USNMR SHAPE

USCINCEUR

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EO 11652 N/A

TAGS: PINT, NO

SUBJECT: BRATTELI TO RESIGN NEXT YEAR AS CHAIRMAN OF NORWEGIAN
LABOR PARTY

BEGIN SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER TRYGVE BRATTELI HAS ANNOUNCED THAT
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HE WILL STEP DOWN AS CHAIRMAN OF THE LABOR PARTY AT THE NATIONAL

CONGRESS OF THE PARTY IN 1975. MAJOR QUESTIONS LEFT OPEN BY THE ANNOUNCEMENT ARE WHETHER HE WILL ALSO RELINQUISH THE PREMIERSHIP NEXT YEAR, AND WHO WILL SUCCEED HIM AS PARTY CHAIRMAN AND, EVENTUALLY, AS PRIME MINISTER. END SUMMARY.

1. CRITICISMS OF LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP HAVE BEEN RISING AS POPULAR FAVOR FALLS IN MONTHLY PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, THERE HAD BEEN NO ADVANCE INDICATION HOWEVER, THAT BRATTELI WOULD CHOOSE THIS PARTICULAR MOMENT TO ANNOUNCE HIS RETIREMENT DECISION, WHICH WAS PUBLISHED JUNE 7 IN THE FORM OF AN INTERVIEW WITH THE LABOR DAILY ARBEIDERBLADET. HE DENIED THAT HIS DECISION WAS RELATED TO RUMORS OF IN-FIGHTING WITHIN THE PARTY BUT SAID HE COULD NOW REVEAL THAT HE HAD NEVER INTENDED, WHEN HE WAS ELECTED TO THE CHAIRMANSHIP IN 1965, TO CONTINUE IN THAT POSITION BEYOND THE 1975 PARTY CONGRESS. "THIS IDEA IS NOT DUE TO ANY SPECIAL POLITICAL EVENTS," HE SAID; "I MAY PERHAPS PUT IT THIS WAY: THERE IS A LIMIT TO MY STRENGTH."

2. THE REASON GIVEN IS DOUBTLESS VALID, WHETHER OR NOT COMPLETE; THE 65-YEAR-OLD BRATTELI, NEVER STRONG SINCE HIS WARTIME CONCENTRATION CAMP EXPERIENCES, HAS INCREASINGLY EXHIBITED SIGNS OF FATIGUE IN RECENT MONTHS. HIS UNSUCCESSFUL FIGHT TO BRING NORWAY INTO THE COMMON MARKET IN 1972 IN PARTICULAR DRAINED HIM OF A GREAT DEAL OF HIS EARLIER ENERGY AND, PERHAPS, ENTHUSIASM. NONETHELESS, BY ANNOUNCING HIS DECISION NOW INSTEAD OF AT THE PARTY CONGRESS ITSELF (WHICH COULD BE HELD AS EARLY AS FEBRUARY 1975 INSTEAD OF IN MAY AS IS CUSTOMARY), HE HAS OPENED DOOR TO INTRAPARTY JOCKEYING AND ALIGNMENTS, AND REDUCED HIS INFLUENCE IN NAMING HIS SUCCESSOR.

3. BRATTELI CAREFULLY AVOIDED ANY REFERENCE TO HIS PLANS WITH REGARD TO THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP. IN PART THIS IS DOUBTLESS DUE TO HIS FEELING THAT IT IS NOT FOR HIM BUT FOR THE STORTING TO DECIDE HOW LONG HE WILL RETAIN THAT POSITION. IT MAY ALSO MEAN THAT HE HAS REACHED NO FIRM DECISION IN THAT REGARD; AT THE MOMENT POLITICIANS AND THE PRESS CAN ONLY SPECULATE AS TO HIS INTENTIONS.

4. ALLUSIONS TO HIS PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE PRIME MINISTER MAY BE PLANNING TO RELINQUISH THE EVEN MORE ONEROUS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BURDENS OF THAT OFFICE AS WELL. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE PRECEDENTS FOR SEPARATING THE POSITIONS OF PARTY CHAIRMAN AND PRIME MINISTER, AND ARBEIDERBLADET'S SENIOR POLITICAL WRITER HAS TOLD AN EMBOFF THAT BRATTELI INTENDS TO DO THAT FOR A FEW MONTHS. ACCORDING TO THIS EXPLANATION, BRATTELI WOULD EXPECT THE PARTY CONGRESS TO CHOOSE REIULF STEEN, PRESENTLY VICE CHAIRMAN, AS HIS SUCCESSOR AS PARTY CHAIRMAN BUT WOULD REMAIN PRIME MINISTER UNTIL AFTER THE SEPTEMBER 1975 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. AT THAT POINT

HE WOULD RESIGN AS PRIME MINISTER IN FAVOR OF ODVAR NORDLI,
CURRENTLY THE LABOR PARTY'S PARLIAMENTARY LEADER. THIS IS A
PLAUSIBLE SCENARIO, BUT WE WILL BE ENDEAVORING TO OBTAIN
OTHER INDICATIONS OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S PLANS IN OUR
SOUNDINGS NEXT WEEK.
BYRNE

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